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As soon as the 13 colonies won independence from the British empire, the United States began its own march toward empire. In 1808, President Thomas Jefferson tried to buy Cuba from Spain. A year later, he wrote to his successor, James Madison, that with the addition of Cuba and Canada "we should have such an empire for liberty as she has never surveyed since the creation."

By 1823, having acquired Florida from Spain a few years earlier, the United States had expanded to within 90 miles of Cuba. Spain was a dying empire. The United States was on the rise. Secretary of State (later president) John Quincy Adams described the likelihood of "annexation" within half a century in a statement that remains the quintessence of US policy: "But there are laws of political as well as of physical gravitation; and if an apple severed by the tempest from its native tree cannot choose but fall to the ground, Cuba, forcibly disjoined from its own unnatural connection with Spain, and incapable of self support, can gravitate only towards the North American Union, which by the same law of nature cannot cast her off from its bosom." Cubans call this policy "la fruta madura" (the ripe fruit).

In 1898, Cubans, waging their Second War of Independence, were close to driving out the colonists from Spain. The US government decided the fruit was ripe. Congress declared war against Spain, ostensibly to help free Cuba. In US history, this is known as the Spanish-American War; the United States emerged with four new ports—the Philippines and Guam in the Pacific and Puerto Rico and Cuba in the Atlantic. But Cuban history calls it the US Intervention in Cuba's War of Independence. US troops occupied Cuba for four years. In exchange for removal of the occupation army, Cuba attached the Platt Amendment, a US law, to their Constitution, granting control of Cuba to the US government. Cuba converted from a colony of Spain to a neocolony of the United States. Among its dictates, the Platt Amendment provided that the United States could intervene militarily at any time and could maintain ports on the island. This amendment was abrogated in 1934 except for the US naval station at Guantanamo, which remains.

US-approved elections led to US-approved repression. US troops occupied Cuba again from 1906 until 1909 and periodically sent troops to help quell rebellion. In 1940 the Cuban people created a new Constitution, along with hopes for a peaceful transition to democracy.

Batista Dictatorship and Revolution

In 1952, a young lawyer was running for Congress in Cuba when General Fulgencio Batista returned from Florida to stage a coup financed and supported by the US government. Batista suspended the Constitution and canceled elections. That young man, Fidel Castro, was not allowed to win or lose an election. The Helms-Burton Act, signed into law by President Clinton in 1996, specifies that neither Fidel nor Raúl Castro will be allowed to run in a "free election" that would be certified by Washington. So it's easy to comprehend why US talk of "free elections" sounds hollow to Cuban ears. Besides, the United States does not have a record of supporting elections won by someone not stamped
Mandela, and the independence of Namibia.

international achievement was in southern Africa, where Cuban troops contributed to the defeat of South African troops in Angola, the government in 1959, the US government in Washington, DC.

But as Cuba began its revolutionary government in 1959, the US government initiated a campaign to overthrow the Cuban government. Declassified documents show that CIA Director Allen Dulles thought in November 1959 that Fidel Castro would be out of power in about eight months. At the same time, he told the British ambassador that, in the words of the ambassador, "he hoped that any refusal by us to supply arms would directly lead to a Soviet-bloc offer to supply. Then he might be able to do something." The US government was deliberately driving Cuba to receive aid from the Soviet Union and its allies.

In December 1959, Dulles recommended to Col. J.C. King, chief of the CIA's Western Hemisphere division, that several actions be undertaken against Cuba. All of those acts continue now in one form or another. Some operations that were "covert" then are overt now. "Clandestine radio attacks" are now open broadcasts from Radio and TV Marti.

The "encouragement of pro-US opposition groups" is now legalized by the Torricelli Act of 1992 and the Helms-Burton Act of 1996 (with the Helms-Lieberman bill of 2001 upping the ante if it becomes law).

On April 6, 1960, a State Department document went even further: "Every possible means should be undertaken promptly to weaken the economic life of Cuba... to bring about hunger, desperation and the overthrow of government." President Eisenhower canceled the sugar quota on July 26, 1960.

Permanent State of Siege

Desperate to be back in Cuba again, the Eisenhower Administration prepared for, and the new Kennedy Administration carried out, the invasion at the Bay of Pigs in April 1961, leading to a major defeat for the United States. Another plan to overthrow the government, Operation Mongoose, was launched in November 1961, leading directly to the Missile Crisis of October 1962, the date planned for the downfall of the Cuban government.

The order to end all trade with Cuba in February 1962 was part of Operation Mongoose. The Soviet Union and its allies filled the vacuum, assuming the 85 percent of Cuban trade that had been part of US-Cuban relations.
When the Cuban government did not fall, efforts to bring it down turned into a state of siege that has continued to this day, complete with infiltrations, armed attacks, sabotage, assassinations, bombings, chemical and biological warfare, bribery, constant disinformation, and a travel ban aimed at keeping US citizens from going to see revolutionary Cuba for themselves.

In June 1976, when George W. Bush Sr. was CIA director, Commanders of the United Revolutionary Organizations (CORU) was founded in order to coordinate terrorist attacks by Cuban Americans. In October, a Cuban passenger jet was blown up, killing all 73 people aboard. Two CORU founders, CIA operatives Orlando Bosch and Luis Posada, were arrested and spent several years in Venezuelan captivity for that crime. Posada escaped in 1986 and has been carrying out terrorism against Cuba ever since. He was arrested in Panama City in November 2000 for a plot to set off plastic explosives at the University of Panama where President Castro planned to speak. Orlando Bosch was allowed to leave Venezuela and granted permission to stay in the United States by the former CIA director who had become President George Bush. Bosch continues to live in Miami among people who call him a freedom fighter. Others regard Bosch and Posada as two of the most notorious terrorists in the world today.

In the late 1970s, Cuban Americans in favor of improving relations organized “El Diálogo,” a dialogue between Cubans in the United States and Cubans on the island. Immediately terrorism escalated, including assassinations of leaders of El Diálogo in the US. Omega 7, another Cuban American terrorist group, was not prosecuted for any murders until it made the mistake of killing a Cuban diplomat in New York City in 1980, an assassination that led after a few years to the arrests and convictions of Omega 7 leader Eduardo Arrocena and other Omega 7 members on charges that included multiple assassinations, bombings and drug trafficking.

In 1981, the Reagan Administration founded the Cuban American National Foundation (CANF) as an arm of US policy toward Cuba, placing Jorge Mas Canosa in the leadership. CANF is the wealthiest and most influential Cuban American group. Its main job for the Reagan Admin-

### Despite growing support for ending trade sanctions, US policy continues to be based on a vision of Cuba as an obstacle to US global hegemony.

...continued from page two

oration was to lobby for anti-Cuban policy in Congress. As a result, three influential Cuban Americans have been elected to Congress—two Florida Republicans and a New Jersey Democrat.

### After the Fall of the Soviet Union

In 1991 the Soviet Union formally disbanded. Once again, 85 percent of Cuba’s trade vanished. This time there was no bloc of nations to fill the vacuum. For three decades Washington had called Cuba part of the Soviet threat. When this could no longer conceivably be true, Washington could have offered to cooperate with Cuba in maintaining its health and education systems. Instead the US government escalated its state of siege.

CANF and its allies in Congress created the Torricelli Act, shepherded through Congress by then-Representative Robert Torricelli, a New Jersey Democrat who is now a senator. Presidential candidate Bill Clinton promoted the bill and President George Bush signed it into law in October 1992. Torricelli proclaimed that Fidel Castro would fall within months. He announced that he wanted “to wreak havoc on that island,” figuring to starve the Cuban people into submission so that they would rise up and overthrow their government.

The Torricelli Act essentially restored the conditions of sanctions that were established in the early 1960s. For instance, ships that stopped in Cuba could not come to the United States for six months thereafter. Perceiving the green light from Washington, terrorists increased attacks. For example, Comandos L shelled a tourist hotel and bragged about it on Miami television, declaring war on tourists as tourism became Cuba’s main means of survival.

Although the Cuban economy spiraled downward, it started reviving by 1994. In response, the Helms-Burton law of 1996 expanded sanctions. Section 109 mandates financial support for “dissidents.” Its extraterritorial segments, Title III and Title IV, have led to resistance by US allies who trade with Cuba.

Again a green light led to runaway terrorism. Luis Posada became so brazen that he told investigative reporters that Jorge Mas Canosa and other CANF leaders helped finance his bombing campaign in Cuba in 1997, killing an Italian tourist.

With Cuba no longer tied to a non-existent Soviet Union, opposition to US sanctions has increased in the United States and around the world. Pastors for Peace has led a dozen Friendshipment Caravans to Cuba since 1992, defying both travel and trade bans by refusing to ask permission to travel while delivering humanitarian supplies to Cuba. The UN General Assembly has voted overwhelmingly each year, starting in 1992, for an end to US trade sanctions. The vote in the year 2000 was 167 to three (Israel, the Marshall Islands, and the United States).

But despite growing support for ending trade sanctions and improving relations with Cuba, US policy continues to be based on a vision of Cuba as an obstacle to US global hegemony. Consequently, neither Cuba nor the United States has been able to see what kind of society the Cuban people might create if allowed to develop independently without being under siege from a superpower only 90 miles distant.

### Footnotes

1 Declassified US State Department document as quoted by Ricardo Alarcon in an address before the UN General Assembly, November 9, 1999.


Close But No Cigar . . . Yet

Working Group Seeks to Change US Policy Toward Cuba

MAVIS ANDERSON

The majority of US citizens want a new US policy toward Cuba. Many want to end the embargo and reestablish normal relations with our neighbor Cuba. An encouraging small step was taken last year with the passage of the FY2001 agriculture appropriations bill. Language in this bill attempted to update US/Cuba policy to make it appropriate to a post-Cold War reality; yet the United States is long past due in crafting a new comprehensive, humanitarian, and effective policy toward Cuba. We are still waiting for the Bush Administration to issue regulations that would put the new policy into effect. It may be a long wait.

In fact, during the previous congressional session, supporters of a change in US policy toward Cuba lost a previous victory. In October 2000, the agriculture appropriations conference committee voted to allow the first US sales of food and medicine to the Cuban government in nearly 40 years. But the bill that was finally signed into the law by then-President Bill Clinton prohibits the extension of both US government and private US financing to Cuba for its purchases. Any sales to Cuba would have to be on a cash-only basis, or with financing and credits arranged through third-country sources. Cuba, for its part, has expressed its intention to refrain from any purchases from US producers under these discriminatory terms, which apply to no country in the world except Cuba. Very significantly, the bill signed into law also prohibits future expansion of the categories of US citizens allowed to travel to Cuba by codifying into law the current travel restrictions, taking away the power of the President to modify these travel restrictions. (The sale of medicine to Cuba has already technically been legal, but with strict licensing provisions and end-use monitoring that severely discourage US pharmaceutical companies from applying for licenses.)

Votes earlier in the year 2000 in both the House of Representatives and the Senate on sanctions imposed on Cuba were overwhelming victories in favor of a positive change in US policy toward Cuba. However, those victories were stolen in backroom deals among Republican leaders and in conference committee maneuvering. The will of a few members of Congress with special interests and with power subverted and overturned the will of the majority in Congress—and the will of the US people, the majority of whom have repeatedly expressed their desire in a variety of national polls for relaxing sanctions toward Cuba.

New Legislative Initiatives

Now supporters are faced with the task of correcting the financing shortcomings of last year’s legislation, as well as moving both the debate and the actuality concerning US/Cuba policy beyond surface actions to a comprehensive and deep change in policy. This task is made more challenging in the context of a Bush Administration that owes a great deal to the Cuban Americans of South Florida for the role they played in the presidential election results.

However, the unexpected change in Senate Party line-up and the resolve of the majority of members of Congress to change policy have garnered hope among advocates for a new US/Cuba policy. Already during this session of the 107th Congress, more than 20 Cuba policy bills have been introduced, the great majority of them calling for an easing of the embargo against Cuba. The most significant and most

continued on page five
broadly supported of these bills is the "Bridges to the Cuban People Act" (see box on page four).

Additionally, many members of Congress are clear about the centrality of the issue of freedom to travel. Representative Howard Berman (D-CA) offered a “freedom from all economic embargoes cur­rently in force, including Cuba. It was de­feated by a decision from International Rela­tions Committee Chairman Henry Hyde (R-IL), who ruled that the travel language was not germane to the State Department bill, even though (or especially because) the votes were there to pass the measure. This language from Congressman Berman is expected to be introduced again as a free­standing bill or as an amendment to an­other legislative vehicle, and additional bills removing travel restrictions may be intro­duced in various places in the Senate.

In opposition to these positive bills, Senator Jesse Helms (R-NC) and Representa­tive Lincoln Diaz-Balart (R-FL) have intro­duced the so-called Cuban Solidarity Act (S. 894 and H.R. 1271) that would pro­vide Cuban dissidents with direct aid from the US government. While upon initial con­sideration this approach may seem like an effective way to expeditiously bring about democratic change in Cuba, in fact we would likely have the opposite effect. If Cuban dissidents were to receive direct financial support from the United States, they would be viewed in Cuba as puppets of the US government, further marginalizing them within Cuban society and giving them less legitimacy than they currently have. This is the view expressed by the major­ity of dissidents themselves in response to Senator Helms’ initiative. Providing di­rect aid to Cuba’s internal opposition would also possibly endanger individual dissi­dents. It would strengthen the Cuban government’s argument that all dissidents are foreign-inspired subversives, and it could provoke the Cuban government to crack down on internal opposition. The result would be the further closing of spaces that exist within Cuban society. This approach by Senator Helms and Representa­tive Diaz-Balart represents a misguided, ineffective political strategy that would undermine and endanger, rather than em­power, Cuban dissidents. It would not bring about democratic change in Cuba; instead, it would inflame tensions within Cuba and between the US and Cuban governments.

Time to Move Ahead
It is time for the United States to de­velop a new policy approach toward Cuba that would benefit both the Cuban people and the American people. The new Bridges legislation does just that. The United States should extend the hand of friendship to our Cuban neighbors. In addition to bridg­ing the gap between our peoples, this legis­lation benefits Americans by honoring

our desire to respond to humanitarian needs, by restoring the freedom of travel to US citizens, by removing agricultural sanctions that unfairly punish US farmers and ranchers, and by making Cuba’s groundbreaking medical technology avail­able for import. We need this bill passed.

Mavis Anderson coordinates the Cuba program of the Latin America Working Group (LAWG), a coalition of more than 65 national religious, human rights, grassroots, and development organiza­tions. For more information, contact LAWG at www.lawg.org.

Sister Cities Make Links

LISA VALANTI

Of the organizations working towards the normalization of US-Cuba rela­tions in the United States, the US-Cuba Sister Cities Association (USCSCA) is the only US organization facilitating direct signed bilateral agreements of mutual co­operation between elected officials from the US and Cuba. USCSCA’s goal is simply to include Cuba in what are considered con­ventional US/sister city relationships. We believe it is inopportune to exclude the Cuban and US peoples from the ben­efits inherent in traditional international people-to-people sister city exchange pro­grams, solely on the basis of political bias and punitive economic measures as en­forced by the US government.

Our fraternal organization, Sister Cities International, defines such relationships as “... a broad-based, officially approved, long-term partnership between two com­munities, counties or states in two coun­tries. A sister city, county or state relation­ship becomes official with a signing cer­emony of the top-elected officials of the two local jurisdictions, following approval by the local city councils (county commis­sions or state legislatures), as appropriate. Sister city partnerships have the potential to carry out the widest possible diversity of activities of any international program, including every type of municipal, busi­ness, professional, educational and cultural exchange or project. Sister city programs are also unique in that they inherently in­volve the three main sectors in a commu­nity: local government, businesses, and a wide variety of citizen volunteers (and civil society or non-profit organizations).”

Formed in March of 1999, USCSCA is a nationwide, community led, diverse grass­roots organization that empowers people with a unique opportunity to become ‘citiz­en diplomats’ and turn personal desires for improved US-Cuba relations into con­crete action. USCSCA represents the sile­nced vast majority of the US public whose interests are not reflected in US policy.

As the result of sister city relationships, Cuban veterinarians are being trained to use acupuncture in large animal pain relief through the Seattle sister cities organiza­tion. A Cuban artist painted a mural in Phila­delphia as part of that city’s mural project. Pittsburgh concentrates on cultural and academic exchanges including the Univer­sity of Pittsburgh’s Semester-at-Sea.

‘Mutually beneficial’ is a key concept in the proposals USCSCA supports. We rec­ognize Cuba as a sovereign and inde­pendent nation, and thus respect and work with Cuba’s existing laws and government.

Sister Cities provide tangible mechanisms for every community to stand up and be counted, and to refuse to be disenfran­chised from national policy making. Our local sister city affiliates, linked through USCSCA, have become a visible nation­wide constituency for change in US policy.

Lisa Valanti is the president of US-Cuba Sister Cities Association. For more information, contact USCSCA, www.uscsca.org; USCSCA@aol.com.
Like its neighbor across the Florida straits, Cuban society was shaped by 500 years of European conquest, racist exploitation and periodic violence in defense of white supremacy. But oppression also breeds resistance. In Cuba, the mountains of Oriente sheltered the palenques, or strongholds of the cimarrón, communities of escaped slaves living in defiance of the white man’s authority. Thus, from the beginning, “the fear of the blacks” became a recurring theme in the island’s history—explaining both the longevity of Spanish colonial rule, the disastrous domestic policies of subsequent US-dominated regimes and the flight of Cuba’s white, professional class in the early 60s. These same mountains were birthplace to successive struggles for independence and blistering dance music.

Before the Revolution, the island’s white elite disparaged and attempted to suppress the music of the barrios. But even as white Cubans pursued European culture and the Cuban variant of “Jim Crow,” new dance rhythms, instruments and social venues emerged as acts of cultural resistance among the darker masses. Indeed, depending on the range of opportunities presented, the anti-racist struggle in Cuba was as likely to be waged on the dance floor as on the battlefield or a picket line.

In Cuban music, the spirit of constant renewal and improvisation is expressed in the notion of sandunguera, the combined word-form for salt and pepper, signifying the fusion of opposites. Like most Cuban-based bands, Los Van Van describes its music as a mélange of styles and traditions: “Timba con rumba y rock. Mambo con conga y pop.” On the track “Somos Cubanos” (“We are Cubans”), the band celebrates a progressive race-consciousness, recounting the “discovery” of their beautiful island, the extermination of the indigenous population and the importation of a labor force from Africa. Over time, the song says, blacks mixed with the Spaniards and a new people were born: a “tasty mix,” the mulata criolla. The chorus proudly proclaims “Somos Cubanos, Español y Africanos.” Dangerous stuff.

But this celebration of national identity doesn’t mean that racism has died in Cuba. To be sure, the Revolution has delivered on its early promises of food, land, health care, housing, education and employment, equitably distributed to all—through rationing if necessary. Likewise, many outlawed African cultural forms found space to assert themselves openly as part of Cuba’s social reconstruction. And, finally, Cuba’s numerous acts of material and technical support, solidarity toward struggling nations in Africa and Latin America and leadership role among the non-aligned nations are well documented. Nevertheless, and despite Fidel’s confident prediction in 1966, the color line did not disappear with the end of class privilege in the socialist state.

“The Cuban revolution, with all its defects, was never divorced from the discourse and symbolism of Africa,” observes Pedro Pérez Sarduy, a noted Afro Cuban journalist. “The revolution has impacted greatly on race relations and eradicated major inequalities.” However, he also recognizes “the persistence and recent resurgence of often unexpected—at times subtle, at times blatant—racism.”

Cuba’s revolution is an ongoing process of change rooted deeply in its history and traditions—again, a fusion of apparent opposites. When asked by journalists if Cuba would adopt the Soviet or Maoist variant of socialism, Che Guevara reportedly countered that Cuba was constructing “socialismo con pachanga” (a popular Cuban dance rhythm).

“Permiso que llegó Van Van, permiso!” Since 1962, Cuban musicians and artists have enjoyed an unprecedented level of government support as employees of the Ministry of Culture. In the late 1970s, the curriculum of the free national music schools expanded to include jazz and traditional Cuban music forms, widely promoting what one popular entertainer termed “the music of the people, of the poor barrios... music that comes from below.” Musicians with sufficiently large followings are dispatched as cultural ambassadors serving Cuba’s foreign and domestic policy. Cuban performers have proven their value by attracting new export dollars (in overseas concert tickets and compact disc sales), stimulating expanded cultural exchange and the growing tourist economy.

More importantly, Cuban bands are underlining the flip-side of the economic embargo of Cuba, the information blockade imposed on the American people. Regular visits from Los Van Van, Cubanismo, the Afro-Cuban All-Stars, Cuban rap crew Orishas, and various artists of Buena Vista fame demonstrate the potential of a kind of dance-beat diplomacy by bringing Cuba’s story directly to the American people.

As Temple University scholar Robin Moore has observed, “What was once banned [Afro-Cuban music] is now Cuba’s pride and glory.”

Los Van Van, Cuba’s premier dance band, is renowned for its high-energy sound, improvisational lyrics and wildly enthusiastic international audiences. Breaching the 40-year US embargo in 1997, Los Van Van’s annual visits surge cross-country like an elemental force thrilling audiences with hard-driving, non-stop, two-hour-plus dance sets.

But on the last date in a 26-city concert tour in 1999, the crowd surrounding the Miami Arena had not come to dance. In a confrontation orchestrated by a group of Bay of Pigs veterans, some 3,500 Cuban-Americans of Miami’s exilio community defied riot police to pelt concertgoers with...
eggs, bottles, stones and threats as they exited the arena. At the end of the evening, the toll was 11 arrests, with no serious injuries—though the concert promoter reported a $50,000 loss on the evening.

Foreshadowing its role in the Elián González affair, the local political establishment decried the violence, but waffled on attributing blame. Police reports confirmed that protesters had marched to the arena from an anti-Castro documentary film, but that didn’t deter Miami mayor Alex Penelas from asking the White House to deny future visa requests for the band. Citing a concern for public safety, the city attorney even pursued a court injunction against Los Van Van. Finally, turning reality on its head, Penelas suggested that “Castro sympathizers” posing as demonstrators had actually provoked the disturbance.

The strategy of mob intimidation evidently had its desired effect on another popular black musical ensemble based in Havana when the Buena Vista Social Club immediately cancelled its scheduled Miami Beach concert, reluctant to experience more of the same.

### Cuban Americans Suffer US Policy

#### The Cuban American Alliance Seeks a New Course for US-Cuba Policy

**DELVIS FERNÁNDEZ**

Americans across party lines and geographical areas continue to push for changes in US-Cuba policy. Well over two-thirds of Americans believe they should be free to travel and to sell food and medicine to Cuba (according to a poll conducted last April by the Rasmussen Research Institute of Raleigh, North Carolina for the Washington-based Cuba Policy Foundation). Despite major opinion shifts in Congress along with increased American support for changes in US trade and travel policy, Cuban Americans continue to bear the brunt of a policy that divides loved-ones and deprives them of basic necessities of life.

Notwithstanding threats of fines and jail, almost 200,000 Americans last year traveled to Cuba. More than 130,000 of these travelers were Cuban Americans. Despite threats of ostracism from friends and community functions, five Bay of Pigs veterans returned to Cuba, opting for reconciliation over hostile confrontation.

In addition to the trade embargo and travel restrictions, US policy also includes the Cuban Adjustment Act. This act exempts Cubans from general U.S. immigration policy and grants Cubans who reach U.S. soil a work permit, welfare assistance, residence rights, and (in due course) full U.S. citizenship rights. This policy stands in sharp contrast to what awaits millions of undocumented immigrants arriving on U.S. shores from other countries in the hemisphere, who face deportation, extended legal action and may never have the opportunity to become US citizens.

But the privileges granted to Cubans have a sinister side in the destruction of families and the imposition of draconian laws that many find impossible to obey. Once in the US, Cubans are restricted to a single visit to Cuba every 12 months under the excuse of dealing with a compelling family emergency. They are also limited as to the amount of and the frequency with which money may be sent to their families.

**The Cuban American Alliance**

In 1995 the Cuban American Alliance Education Fund (CAAEF) was founded to strengthen ties among Cuban American organizations and U.S. organizations that advocate for changes in U.S.-Cuba policy. In particular, the Alliance seeks to lift all restrictions on travel and humanitarian trade with Cuba outside ideological constraints and within the dynamics of the Cuban American community. The Alliance’s sphere of action includes congressional visits, family linking, and engagements of mutual benefit between Cubans and Americans. Board and Advisory Council members assist in the establishment of sister-city projects, cultural and sports exchanges, community programs, visits by Cuban professionals, student exchange programs, ties between Cubans and African American organizations, and fund raisers.

*continued on page eight*
Limitados Fisico Motores

Helms $100 million proposal for "Cuban President's promises of "Cuba Libre," plus trade and travel restrictions. The two years. Although strides have been made based more on Cold War nostalgia than on the realpolitik of the present.

Advocates of Cuba-policy change have emerged from the Senate, the realpolitik of the present.

Challenges and Opportunities

Today, we face new challenges as a result of the George W. Bush presidency. Advocates of Cuba-policy change have been more on the defensive, trying to safeguard a modicum of progress of the last two years. Although strides have been made at the grassroots level, our work in Congress has had little impact on current trade and travel restrictions. The President's promises of "Cuba Libre," plus the nominations of policy hardliners such as Otto Reich, John Negroponte, and Roger Noriega, taken together with Senator Helms $100 million proposal for "Cuban dissidents" presaged a period of hostility against Cuba.

Since its founding in 1991, the US/Cuba Labor Exchange has organized more than 30 delegations to Cuba. Participants have included rank-and-file workers, union officials and members, community activists, students, academics, and "ordinary" Americans interested in learning more about Cuba from a labor perspective. As only a small minority of working people in the US are unionized, it is critical that we include the "not yet organized" in our delegations. We have organized delegations for specific groups—such as teachers and artists—and convened a religious/labor delegation for the visit of Pope John Paul II.

The visits of the US/Cuba Labor Exchange delegations have included factories, joint venture enterprises, farming and agricultural enterprises, as well as schools, hospitals, daycare centers, etc. Each visit includes a substantive meeting with Cuban Trade Federation (CTC) officials and an opportunity to talk with workers about their jobs, union activity, politics, and any other topic of mutual interest. These visits are indeed a cornerstone of the idea of exchange; both groups (US and Cuban) have a chance to question and learn from each other in both formal and informal discussion.

Delegates have attended international conferences of labor activists organized by the CTC, including conferences for women unionists and conferences to learn about and combat neoliberal globalization. These meetings have given US participants an opportunity to meet Cuban trade unionists, to interact and exchange experiences and strategies with unionists from around the world, and to meet and learn from other delegates from various parts of the United States.

The Labor Exchange has brought delegations to Cuba each year for the May Day activities which include not only the massive May Day march, but also international labor conferences scheduled to coincide with International Workers' Day.

For 10 years, the Labor Exchange has helped American workers to gain an understanding of both the Cuban reality and of the role of unions in a socialist society. This knowledge helps with the struggle we face every day in the US: problems impeding unionization, problems in enforcing labor laws, problems of racism. We have had the opportunity to interact with trade unionists from all over the world, to better understand the common struggles all workers face. Upon our return to the US, we work within our communities and the labor movement to change US policy towards Cuba. We have given interviews, published articles and mobilized Americans to challenge the US government's Cuba policy. We have introduced resolutions within the AFL-CIO calling for an end to the blockade.

Delvis Fernández is the president of the Cuban American Alliance Education Fund (CAAEF). For more information, contact caaej@igc.org.

NALDA VIGEZZI

The US/Cuba Labor Exchange offers workers from both countries an opportunity to learn about each other by bringing US labor delegations to Cuba, and by organizing speaking tours of Cuban trade unionists to the US. In addition, we have organized and participated in national and international trade union conferences in solidarity with Cuba.

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The Labor Exchange has observed two Congresses of the CTC. The CTC Congress, which culminates on May Day, is the vehicle for outlining and approving the Union priorities for the next five years. At this year’s Congress, the idea of expanding paid maternity leave from 6 months to one year was proposed. It became law that same week. Labor Exchange delegates will be able to bring back their experience of this process to their communities as an example of the power of workers and the CTC.

For 10 years, the Labor Exchange has helped American workers to gain an understanding of both the Cuban reality and of the role of unions in a socialist society. This knowledge helps with the struggle we face every day in the US: problems impeding unionization, problems in enforcing labor laws, problems of racism. We have had the opportunity to interact with trade unionists from all over the world, to better understand the common struggles all workers face. Upon our return to the US, we work within our communities and the labor movement to change US policy towards Cuba. We have given interviews, published articles and mobilized Americans to challenge the US government’s Cuba policy. We have introduced resolutions within the AFL-CIO calling for an end to the blockade.

NALDA VIGEZZI is the Northeast Coordinator of the US/Cuba Labor Exchange. For information, contact POB 39188, Redford, MI 48239; www.geocities.com/us-cuba-labor.
Challenging an Immoral Law
IFCO/Pastors for Peace Sponsors US/Cuba Friendshipments

REV. LUCIUS WALKER, JR.

In 1988, a passenger ferryboat in Nicaragua carrying members of the Interreligious Foundation for Community Organization (IFCO) and 200 Nicaraguan civilians was brutally attacked by Contras. Two passengers were killed and 29 wounded—excluding me, then serving as IFCO’s director. In response to this violent act of terrorism, IFCO announced the formation of Pastors for Peace, an action/education project designed to support the daily victims of unjust and immoral US foreign policies.

IFCO/Pastors for Peace offers concerned people in the US an opportunity to build a “people-to-people foreign policy” that is based on justice and mutual respect. Its caravans utilize the delivery of humanitarian aid as an organizing tool to educate the US public about the genocidal effects of the US government’s policies upon many Third World nations. IFCO/Pastors for Peace has organized nearly 50 caravans to Nicaragua, El Salvador, Guatemala, Chiapas, Mexico, Honduras, and Cuba, delivering tons of life-giving aid and involving thousands of US and international activists from a rich diversity of faith perspectives, backgrounds and experiences in active efforts to change US foreign policy.

Caravans Challenge Cuban Embargo

In 1992, IFCO/Pastors for Peace began organizing US/Cuba Friendships as a direct challenge to the immoral 41-year old US economic blockade of Cuba. Using non-violent civil disobedience, the group does not seek a US government license to deliver aid to the Cuban people. Since 1992, 12 IFCO/Pastors for Peace caravans have delivered 2,165 tons of life-giving aid to Cuban schools, churches, and hospitals—without a US Treasury department license. We believe that to send aid, as a gesture of solidarity to our brothers and sisters in Cuba, we should not have to ask the permission of their enemy. Furthermore, the US government uses licensing as a ploy to legitimize a harsh and inhumane policy which endangers the lives of the Cuban people by denying them access to vital supplies, including food and medicines. As people of faith and conscience, we believe it is our duty to expose this immoral policy.

The first caravan began with simple aid: 100 caravanasistas carried Spanish Bibles, powdered milk, children’s medicines, bicycles and school supplies. The US government had never seen a direct grassroots challenge to the blockade, and they responded with force. CNN aired photos of US Treasury officers as they assaulted a Catholic priest who was carrying Bibles to take to Cuba. Our emergency response network, and the CNN coverage, prompted thousands of calls to Washington from across the US, and the caravan was allowed to cross.

In 1993 and 1996, the US Treasury officials seized aid destined for Cuban churches and hospitals—a little yellow schoolbus and 400 computers for an island-wide medical information network, respectively. In response, caravanasistas waged hunger strikes to call national and international attention to free the aid. In both cases, with the help of thousands of supporters, justice prevailed and the caravan delivered the little yellow school bus and the computers — without a US Treasury license. Successive caravans have delivered increasingly sophisticated medical and educational equipment and supplies.

Having realized that the US/Cuba Friendships cannot be stopped from delivering their cargo to the Cuban people, the US government has been forced to find other ways to stop the work of IFCO/Pastors for Peace. Beginning in 1998, the US Treasury Department tried to seize IFCO bank records in an attempt to shut us down—a blatant McCarthyite invasion of privacy and a violation of the separation of church and state. After a spirited campaign, IFCO/Pastors for Peace won the legal battle and the US Treasury Department dropped its demand for IFCO records.

The US blockade is a double-edged sword: denying both Cubans and North Americans access to goods and materials produced in both countries. In a bold new gesture, the 12th US/Cuba Friendshipment, upon its return from Cuba on July 12, 2001, will attempt to deliver much needed health-related products manufactured in Cuba but not available in the US. US law bans most products made in Cuba from entering the US without a license, which is rarely granted. Through this act of reciprocal solidarity, we will help address some of the detrimental effects the US blockade has had upon the people of the United States.

Rev. Lucius Walker, Jr. is the Executive Director of IFCO/Pastors for Peace. For more information about IFCO/Pastors for Peace, the US/Cuba Friendshipment Caravans, or the Cuban Medical School Scholarship Program, contact: IFCO/Pastors for Peace, 402 W. 145th Street, NY, NY 10031; ifco@igc.org; www.ifconews.org.

Cuba’s School of Medicine to Train US Doctors Without Cost

IFCO/Pastors for Peace has assumed the responsibility to begin recruitment for the Cuban medical scholarship program. Cuban President Fidel Castro made an offer to an IFCO-facilitated Congressional Black Caucus delegation in June 2000 to provide free medical training for young people of color from low-income, working class, and medically underserved communities in the US.

The first group of eight US students began their studies in Cuba in April 2001, with additional groups following in June and August of this year. The intent of this scholarship offer is to help the US fill the dramatic need for health care in some of its most medically neglected and impoverished areas.

Students must make the life-long commitment to provide medical service to these areas upon their return to the US. Cuba is offering 500 full scholarships per year for students from underserved communities in the US to study medicine—free of charge—in Cuba.
Many women's visions and values—in the US and globally—have paralleled the priorities of the Cuban Revolution: an emphasis on human development, alternatives to violence and the end of poverty and discrimination, and providing the material conditions for full social, cultural and political participation. Specifically this includes the right to health care, housing, education (through university level), paid maternity leave and subsidized childcare. Reproductive health services in Cuba are free upon demand. Women are the majority of Cuba's doctors, teachers, scientists, researchers and represent 47% of the labor force (“From Beijing to 2000,” the Federation of Cuban Women). The Cuban Constitution outlaws discrimination on the basis of gender, race and sexual orientation.

Cuba has made significant gains with regard to the status of women, measured against the international standard of the Beijing Platform for Action from the Fourth United Nations World Conference on Women. These gains are more surprising when contrasted with the economic devastation due to loss in trade and aid from the former Soviet bloc countries and the 40-year-old US economic blockade. The enormous gains to advance the status of Cuban women in the last 40 years due to the efforts of the Cuban Revolution are rarely known or understood—given the information blockade in the US maintained by both government and corporate-controlled media.

The gains do not tell the whole story, however. The rush to develop tourism to recover foreign currency in the wake of Cuba's economic crisis has brought immense social costs—including jineterismo. Jineterismo, or an exchange of goods and services by young Cuban women with international tourists and businessmen, is a term used to describe the return of prostitution. Until recently, coverage by most feminist and alternative media on jineterismo has either overshadowed or failed to report the vast majority of Cuban women's lives.

Now it is crucial to build a US-based women's movement to normalize relations with Cuba due to several factors: the US government blockade's deepening cruelty to Cuban women and children in violation of international law; growing domestic support in many sectors to end the economic embargo in trade and travel; increasing global consciousness by US women's movements; and the hard-line resistance to normalizing relations by the old/new Bush Administration.

"I came to Cuba to see for myself the disparity people are suffering here due to US foreign policy. So it was very necessary for me to come on this delegation, but even more necessary, to return and educate the public and try to remove the veil, remove the big sleep that people are facing in the US.” —Donna O'Donovan, university student, Cape Cod, MA.

Women's Delegations Challenge Policy

Collaborations at national and local levels among feminist groups have begun to make inroads for change. Hermanas: Sisterhood in Central America and the Caribbean formed in 1988 to organize women locally to experience first-hand the impact of women's leadership in Nicaragua during the Sandinista Revolution. In 1990, Hermanas began organizing women to travel to Cuba. Annual women's delegations bring medical supplies and women's information to Cuba, and help educate US communities about the human effects of US/Cuba policy.

Another organization that connects Cuban and US-based women's groups is the Northwest Labor and Employment Law Office (LELO), based in Seattle. Founded in 1973, LELO is a community-based organization led by and for low-income workers of color and women workers to address issues of economic and racial justice. Their EveryWoman's delegations to China and Cuba have significantly increased the leadership of women of color and working class women to educate their own and the broader communities about the need to dismantle the US blockade.

Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), founded in 1915, is the oldest and largest international women's peace organization working to prevent war by addressing the root causes of violence and social injustice and advocating the transfer of resources from the military to human needs. A close relationship has developed between the US section of WILPF and the Federation of Cuban Women (FMC).

For nearly 10 years, WILPF, Hermanas, and, in 1999, LELO, have co-sponsored delegations to Cuba. The ultimate goal of women's delegations to Cuba—and the organizing which accompanies them—is to normalize relations between these two sovereign nations and to build an inclusive and progressive women's movement in the US. Campaign actions aim to empower diverse women in the US and other parts of the world to participate in and develop just and peaceful international relations, deepen global women's solidarity and use a woman-to-woman citizen diplomacy model to craft methods to normalize relations between the US and Cuba.

"What's great about traveling to Cuba is to see so many women in leadership. This is empowering to women here in the US, especially those of us working in the domestic violence movement.” —Emma Catague, Asian & Pacific Islander Women
Building a Movement and Sisterhood

In conjunction with organizing annual delegations, Hermanas, LELO and WILPF, separately and together, have designed educational tools and activist media, advocated to change legislation, helped start the US-Cuba Sister Cities Association. These groups have brought thousands of dollars of humanitarian aid in medicines and information with a focus on women. This work to build a US women's movement for Cuba will be deepened through a widely consultative, geographically and demographically diverse educational process.

A national advisory committee with women from LELO, Hermanas and WILPF are spending a year to invest in this process. Women's Roundtables on Cuba, facilitated by 40-50 local organizations are creating alliances and networks between women from different sectors, including: women's rights organizations; social and economic justice organizations; Cuba solidarity groups; media; progressive philanthropies; and parliamentarians. Responses to "Your Ideas" questionnaires to extend the outreach process are gathered electronically and by mail to increase geographic representation.

The Women and Cuba National Leadership Summit (to be held later this year) will expand on the results of the Roundtable discussions and "Your Ideas" questionnaires. The Summit will call women to action from across the country to determine the vision, values and a three-to-five year comprehensive plan to create just and peaceful relations with Cuba.

"Why women? Why have we chosen Cuba? This is a strategic moment—after Beijing, during this huge escalation against Cuba. It is a chance for us to play a historic role. It is also a way for us to increase our power as women. That is an important thing for ourselves, for the Cuban women, for women in the whole hemisphere and for women in the two-thirds world." — Marilyn Clement, co-organizer, De Hermana a Hermana (Sister to Sister Project of WILPF/Global Exchange/Hermanas/Madre).

Cindy Domingo is a member of the Board of the Labor and Employment Law Office (www.lelo.org). Jan Strout is the co-founder of Hermanas (a RESIST grantee), and is co-chair of WILPF's Cuba Action Committee (www.wilpf.org) and the National Network on Cuba (www.cubasolidarity.com). For more information, contact Jan Strout, janstrout@qwest.net; (206) 547-0940.

Cuba Resources

The resources below, and those at the end of each article, provide a partial list of resources and organizations for those interested in activism to change US/Cuba policy. This is by no means an exhaustive list but can serve as a starting point.

National Organizations

| National Network on Cuba, PO Box 225303, San Francisco, CA 94112; www.cubasolidarity.com. More than 80 organizations and individual members working to end the US blockade. |
| Center for Cuban Studies, 124 W. 23rd Street, New York, NY 10011; www.cubaupdate.org. Maintains the Art Space Gallery, distributes books and videos, travel program, Cuba Update publication. |
| US-Cuba INFOMED, PO Box 450, Santa Clara, CA 95052; www.igc.org/cubasol/. Solidarity organization with Cuba's national health care system. |
| Venceremos Brigade, PO Box 7071, Oakland, CA 94601; stas_2@msn.com. Organizes educational and work trips to Cuba. |
| Cuba Action Committee, PO Box 7071, New York, NY 10012; (212) 614-6464. Legal strategies to advance and protect rights guaranteed by the US Constitution, including the right to travel to Cuba. |

Marazú Tours, Inc., 725 River Road, Suite 55, Edgewater, NJ 07020; (800) 223-5334; www.marazutours.com. Provides licensed travel to Cuba. |
National Lawyers Guild, Cuba Subcommittee, 606 Wisconsin Avenue #1706, Milwaukee, WI 53203; aheitz@iga.org. Legal advice and support for travelers. |

Media

Black Radical Congress, Columbia University Station, PO Box 250791, New York, NY, 10025-1599; www.blackradicalcongress.org. Analysis of Cuba, political prisoners, domestic as well as international issues. |
Compañero, companiero@mindspring.com Cuba Information Access on current events. |
Cuba Poster Project, lcushing@iga.org. Documentation and dissemination of Cuba's post-revolutionary poster art. |
NACLA Report on the Americas Bi-monthly independent publication that frequently reports on Cuba; 475 Riverside Drive, Suite 454, New York, NY 10115; www.nacla.org. |
La Revista Cubana de Musica Music from Cuba in English & Spanish; www.cubaweb.cu/tropicana. |
RESIST awards grants six times a year to groups throughout the United States engaged in activism for social and economic justice. In this issue of the Newsletter we list a few grant recipients from our June 2001 allocation cycle. For information, contact the groups at the addresses below.

Kingsport Citizens Committee for a Cleaner Environment
1375 Dewey Avenue
Kingsport, TN 37664
www.kingsportcitizens.org

KCCCE formed in August of 2000 to oppose efforts to grant Willamette Industries air quality permits necessary for its expansion in downtown Kingsport. Through coalition work with other environmental groups, KCCCE alerted the local media to Willamette's true pollution record and contracted with an air quality consultant to model the effects of further expansion. KCCCE put grassroots pressure on city decision makers, state regulators and Willamette officials to enforce current air quality regulations. KCCCE hopes to have Willamette install air quality monitors in key locations in the city and reduce its sulfur dioxide emissions. RESIST's $3,000 grant will build organizational capacity through membership outreach in affected neighborhoods.

Youth Force Coalition
1357 5th Street
Oakland, CA 94607

YFC is a coalition of 38 youth and 10 adult-ally organizations founded after the "Critical Resistance: Beyond the Prison Industrial Complex" national conference in 1998. YFC seeks to build and sustain a strong regional base of youth power to decrease spending on the prison system and increase public support for education and other resources needed to reduce the rate of incarceration. RESIST's $3,000 grant for general support will fund collaborative campaigns, organizer trainings, workshops and other outreach work.

United Gays and Lesbians of Wyoming, Inc.
PO Box 6837
Cheyenne, WY 82003
www.uglw.org

For 14 years, UGLW, the only statewide gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (GLBT) organization in Wyoming, has sought to enhance the lives of GLBT individuals. The group advocates for the protection and promotion of civil rights (including state bias crime legislation), and builds a statewide network of information on GLBT issues and events. RESIST's $3,000 grant will support UGLW's monthly newsletter, a website, a speaker's bureau, and social activities and networking.

Nevada Empowered Women's Project
1101 Riverside Drive
Reno, NV 89503
newproject@earthlink.net

For five years, the NEW Project has existed as Nevada's only group that organizes low-income women statewide. Initiated in response to national welfare reform, the Project began through outreach at housing councils, churches, welfare offices, and Head Start offices. The group focuses on bringing traditionally disenfranchised women to the table to discuss challenges they experience in striving for economic independence. RESIST awarded the NEW Project $3,000 for general support as it strives to give Nevada women a voice.

Tewa Women United
Route 5, Box 298
Santa Fe, NM 87501

Tewa Women United started in 1989 to provide educational and empowerment training activities for residents of the six Tewa-speaking Pueblos in northern New Mexico. The group's activities focus on environmental justice, the prevention of domestic violence, alcohol abuse, and teen suicide, peer support for Indian women, and the strengthening of Tewa values (including in relation to the forces of acculturation). For five years the group has held annual gatherings to address the nuclear contamination of Pueblo lands arising from their proximity to Los Alamos National Laboratory. Tewa Women United received a grant of $3,000 for general support.